

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-7 are active in this application. Claim 1 has been amended to address the antecedent basis issues raised by the Examiner and to rewrite the last portion of the claim for better understanding. The amendments are supported by the claim as originally filed. New claims 4-7 have been added to specify the treatment portion of claim 1. These claims are supported by the specification at page 6. No new matter has been added by these amendments.

The claims stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, 2nd paragraph. The Examiner's rejections based upon antecedent basis have been obviated by the above amendments. In particular, the claims now note that C_R is the level of molecular oxygen present in the liquid phase stream that is recycled into the rectification column, while C_F is the level of molecular oxygen present in the reflux liquid within the rectification column at the recycle point. Further the ratio C_R/C_F is now defined specifically in claim 1. The Examiner's concern regarding the withdrawal point and the recycle point is respectfully traversed. The claim specifies that a stream is withdrawn from at least one withdrawal point, and that after the treating step, a recycle stream is reintroduced into the rectification column at at least one recycle point. The withdrawal point and recycle point are therefore not the same points, as one is an outflow from the rectification column (withdrawal point) and the other is an inflow into the rectification column (recycle point). As such, the claims are very clear as to the identity of these points.

The source of molecular oxygen is not the important part of the claim, but rather the ratio of molecular oxygen in the stream recycled into the rectification column to the molecular oxygen present in the reflux liquid within the rectification column at the recycle point. The specification indicates that molecular oxygen can be present or can be added to the system. Therefore, this rejection should be withdrawn.

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Reply to Office Action of December 22, 2006

As all of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph have been obviated by the present amendments or are believed overcome by the above arguments, the rejections should be withdrawn.

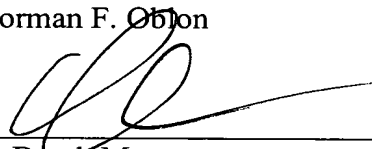
Should there be any remaining issues present, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned representative by telephone in order to address the issues prior to a further Official Action.

Applicants submit that the application is in condition for allowance and early notification of such action is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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